5 November 1981

Dear Harold and Lil:

Thanks for yours of Oct. 28, and hope your colds are better. Thus far I've escaped any suggestion of one, and am relying on our relatively mild winter to carry me through except for an occasional sniffle, which never has been serious.

With your word that Howard had had a tonsillectomy, I called him at his home and we had a nice talk. He seemed well but was still suffering some pain. He thinks they messed up his tongue somehow during the surgery, but it certainly didn't affect his speech. He was almost comically grateful when I told him I knew exactly how miserable one feels after this particular operation, how I had suffered far more from one in 1937 than from a major operation the year before in which they lifted my gall bladder, gallstones and grabbed the appendix while they were about it. He agreed it was better to have the tonsillectomy behind him and appeared to believe me when I assured him he eventually would recover from its after-effects and live happily ever after.

The Lucas man to whom he introduced me is not a writer, as I udnerstand it, but a law graduate who is some kind of a planner and arranger for company operations. I think it was Howard who said during the conversation that the only thing they would insist upon with the Chinese was artistic control. So it's interesting that this point still seems to be unresolved in view of the fact that in the meantime this man, who seems to be Howard's boss, has been to China and returned. According to Howard he had a great time, got the red carpet treatment from the Chinese movie people, but I gather got no clearer idea of what they were willing to do than before he went.

Artistic control is an extremely vague term, considering what Hollywood is capable of doing in its name, and I must say I'm not surprised that the Chinese may be holding out on it. The last Lucas movie, Raiders of the Lost Ark, is one I haven't yet seen, but I understand it concerns a macho American archaeologist who cuts a swath through the Middle East in a search for the Ark of the Covenant, with a good deal of violence and bloodshed along the way. I simply can't see the Chinese turning an American crew loose to film that kind of yarn in their scenery and sets. Even if it were set in the pre-revolutionary past, when foreigners could get away with almost anything because of extraterritoriality and Chinese susceptibility to bribery, the present regime can't be expected to allow such an image to predominate in a film made on their soil. So unless Lucas is willing to use a story which will not reflect unfavorably on the Chinese by exploiting their backwardness and other weaknesses -- even those of the past -- this movie may never be made.

I hope to see Howard and his boss (his name's Mike Leavitt or Levit, I not sure how he spells it) sometime fairly soon in order to introduce them to a China travel expert who might be useful to them, and may emerge with a less murky idea of where things stand.

I was glad to see the piece you sent on the Hartford Courant, although it seemed less informative they it should have been. However, I felt between the lines an undercurrent of dismay among the Courant's staff and a definite impression that the new crew from LA were blustering and confused. Passed it along to Libby, who was glad to have it as she used to read it when she was in college. Haven't heard her reaction yet.

Glad you're keeping a file on Marina. Someone should in view of her lack of citizenship regardless of whether that lack has been of her own choosing. You may be right that no one is going to get serious about deporting her, but that doesn't mean someone could not get serious about needling her with implied threats to do so. Her independent behavior is fascinating. I suppose the question is whether it's spontaneous and genuine or whether soneone has got her to adopt that posture, say one faction still trying to do another in. She is an intelligent Russian woman who has learned her wisdom the hard way. She does her own thinking and that cannot help coming through. That's not the same as being fully in control of her life. I suspect a big factor is her children. There's a writer up in the Napa Valley, Jessamyn West, who did an extraordinary portrait of her and the children several years ago which stressed the unusual beauty of the children. Ms. West ordinarily writes syrupy novels and articles for women's magazines (I think the article on the Oswald-Porter family was in McCalls) but she obviously was sincerely moved by Marina and the kids. She made it quite clear that Marina, at that time anyway, was a fiercely devoted mother and that the eldest child, a girl, was stunningly beautiful.

Everything fine here. I use two or three days a week for Hospice work and the rest of the time trry to keep up with the house and catch up on things that have been neglected, sometimes for years. Time never hangs heavy. How lucky, as you well know.

All the best,

jdw